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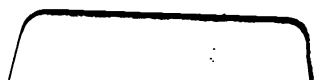
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A LETTER

TO A

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT,

ON THE

SUBJECT OF A BILL

TO ENFORCE THE DUE



94

OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH.

LONDON :

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A LETTER.

DEAR SIR,

Although I am aware of the great practical difficulties attending the various political improvements, which at this time so deeply interest the feelings, and occupy the attention both of the government and the nation; and have in consequence forborne to sign petitions to Parliament, on subjects in which, in common with others, I feel the deepest interest; there is nevertheless one to which, on account of its paramount importance, both to the interests of this country and to a large portion of the globe with which it is connected, as also on account of its being free from any great difficulty in the execution of it, I cannot forbear most earnestly to intreat your serious attention.—It is a bill to enforce the due observance of the Sabbath in this Christian country. Although this is a subject which may not appear to some to fall so directly within the province of a government as those which are exclusively political, I cannot help thinking that a closer investigation of it will show that it is not only equally, but in a more paramount degree, within their province than any other subject of legislation which falls under their cognizance.

It goes to the very foundation of all national prosperity, and touches the very spring and life's blood of all political greatness. Forbearing, as I shall, to cite many of those passages in Scripture, which declare that "righteousness exalteth a nation;" that the destinies of nations, as well as individuals, are in the hands of God; and that "unless the Lord build the city, the watchman waketh but in vain," and that "it is but lost labour that we rise up early, and late take rest," if we trust alone in the arm of flesh and not in the Lord our God, (to which an express *curse* is annexed in Scripture;) I will only observe, that the truth of this principle is exemplified in all ancient history, particularly that of the Jews and the neighbouring nations, as well as that of the four great monarchies. It will appear that luxury and vice occasioned the downfall of all those, as well as of most other nations; and that kingdoms as well as individuals have their "measure of iniquity," beyond which the rod of vengeance and the besom of destruction will not be stayed. When the Israelites were first settled in Canaan, repeated warnings were given them lest they should "forget the Lord their God," and they were threatened with the Divine vengeance in case they did. And at a subsequent period it was declared by David, not only that "the wicked shall be cast into hell," but "all the nations that *forget God*."

With regard to the Sabbath, (which is an institution coëval with the creation, and not confined to the Mosaic dispensation,) Scripture abounds, not only in positive injunctions to keep it *holy*, but in promises of prosperity and protection to those who do, and denunciations of vengeance to those who do not. And the degree to which it is to be kept holy (for most questions of this

kind are questions of degree) as well as the reward of doing it, is pretty accurately delineated in that passage of Isaiah, "If thou turn away thy foot (exercised in the pursuit of pleasure) from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride on the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." To say nothing of the enormous impiety which there appears to be, when God says *expressly* that all his creatures shall rest on the Sabbath, in any man's saying that they *shall not*, (which every man virtually does who compels them to labour for any other purpose than works of necessity or charity;) the bearing of a due observance of this day upon the prosperity of a nation is also exemplified in that passage of Nehemiah, "In those days I saw in Judah some treading wine-presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and *did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city?* Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profan-

ing the Sabbath." I believe it is only habit, which makes us view the manner in which the Sabbath is spent by a large portion of the inhabitants of London and its vicinity, and some other large towns, as a matter of indifference. If a learned Chinese, or a philosopher of any other distant country was to read the Bible through, and then be informed of the manner of spending the Sabbath, in a country having perhaps the highest claim to be called a Christian country of any in the world, would he not think it a disgrace to Christendom that a positive command of the Deity was so flagrantly and so openly violated? If it did not induce *him* to believe the religion false, he would certainly judge that those who professed it thought so. And he never would believe that those could be in earnest about religion, who thought a positive command of God not worth so small a sacrifice. When he found it written, "The statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice the heart, and in keeping of them there is great reward: more to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb;" he would be astonished that the practice of any the Christian country, particularly one believing itself to stand at the very top of Christendom, should fall so far short of its acknowledged obligations.

We are now advancing towards the end of the sixth thousand of years since the creation, and the second of Christianity; and it is the opinion of many learned men, that with the seventh, in analogy to the Christian Sabbath, the millennium will commence. We are also not far from the close of the "time, times and a half," or 1260 years mentioned by Daniel, according to the usual interpretation, in which the prophecies foretell that some

great catastrophe is to happen to the world. The Scriptures also speak of a great "falling away" in matters of religion "in the latter days;" and our Saviour intimates in one of his discourses to his disciples, that when He comes again, He will not find much faith upon earth. Does it not appear as if this epoch was actually approaching? And does not Christianity already exhibit a great deal of the decrepitude of old age? When we look into the family records and private biographies of past ages, we cannot deny that Christianity has greatly declined, both in the universality of its practice and the strictness of its observances; and that it is almost as singular now to be really pious as it was a few centuries back to be otherwise.

But leaving the religious view of the subject, as affecting the destiny of nations through the immediate agency of the Deity, and considering it merely in a political point of view, the desecration of the Sabbath, from its necessary influence upon the moral habits of the people, seems to contain the elements of political disorder, and national deterioration and declension. As the rest of the Sabbath was designed by the Creator to renovate the physical powers of man, so the moral and religious exercises of that day were designed to restore the spiritual energies of his soul, and to repair the injury which it in some degree necessarily sustains from the secular employment of the preceding six. A mind so exercised is prevented from sinking down into mere carnality and religious apathy, and that forgetfulness of God, which the warnings of Scripture denounce, and the history of Scripture exemplifies, as the infallible cause of social degradation and national declension. The food which the mind feeds upon in the course of the Sabbath, supplies it with

nourishment, either good or bad, during the rest of the week. The good or evil of a Sabbath day's employment does not terminate with the day itself, but is digested into the character by the subsequent workings of the mind, and becomes part of the life-blood by which it is sustained, whether it be good or whether it be evil. It is the very sap, which feeds and sustains the national character. The excellent Sir Matthew Hale has recorded his attestation, that through the whole course of his professional experience, in very perilous and eventful times, the success of his secular employments during the week, was always in keeping with his devotional ones of the preceding Sabbath; and that he always found that if the latter had been neglected, the issue of the former was unsatisfactory.

But without resorting to the more immediate providence of God, which no religious person can doubt extends to kingdoms as well as to individuals, it is easy to see, from the philosophy of the human mind, as well as the attestations of history, how the desecration of the Sabbath must tend to hasten the downfall of nations, in the course of natural consequence. Let me therefore entreat you, seeing at what an advanced period of Christianity we have arrived, how greatly this nation is favoured by Providence in its temporal endowments, (and which have, no doubt, been bestowed upon us for some moral purpose,) and how great is its influence upon the moral and religious destinies of the world, to lay this subject seriously to heart, and to exert both your talents and your influence to place the nation, in this respect, on the footing of a truly Christian community; to give it a noble bearing, both in its political and religious aspect; and to enable the heathen world (whom we

seem to be called upon, both by our moral, political, and geographical position, beyond all other nations, to evangelize) to judge of our religion by our practice, and to discern the tree by the beauty and excellence of its fruits. When I consider the injunction of our Saviour to preach the gospel to all nations, and his declaration that it must be so preached before that final consummation, (which does not appear a great way off,) so much dreaded by some, and desired by others, can arrive, and take into view, at the same time, the various political relations of this country throughout the world, I cannot doubt that it is designed to be a principal agent in Christianising mankind, and hastening the completion of that scheme of human redemption, which is probably the most astonishing event that the universe ever witnessed. If so, it behoves us to buckle on our armour, and see that all is right and sound within, before we set out on the glorious enterprise. I have very little doubt that the ill success which has attended our exertions to convert the heathen to Christianity in many countries, particularly in India, has been owing to the bad examples and immoral habits of the Christians themselves. And as long as they proceed from a corrupted source at home, it must always be the same. The making the Sabbath a day of holy rest, must appear so prominent a feature of our religion, to those who learn it from its own true source, that they may well turn with disgust and contempt from those who preach it to them, and at the same time themselves both neglect its ordinances and violate its precepts; and say to us in the language of our own Scriptures, "Thou that teachest others, teachest thou not thyself?" "Physician, heal thyself." I hope therefore that both for your

own sake, and that of the nation, and the important religious interests with which it is connected, you will give this measure your best support; that you may review with satisfaction, at a future period, the share you have had in the legislation of this extensive empire, and not suffer the consolations of your laudable exertions to be marred by the regrets of any important neglect.

When I consider the political and religious aspect of the world, it appears to me that it has moral demands to make upon us of no trifling import. For what other purpose can Providence have placed so large a portion of the world's population, (and that in so scattered and unconnected a form as to give us access to almost every part of the habitable globe,) under the dominion and influence of this country, but to carry on the development of that scheme of providential mercy, which has been unfolding itself, through the ordinary operation of human agencies, for near six thousand years, and seems now, from the actual rapidity of its advancement, and the best calculations of human research, to be fast approaching to its consummation? In speaking of the spread of the gospel throughout the world, there is much said in scripture about extending it to "the isles afar off." Whether by "the isles" are meant the British, or any other isles, it is clear that we have more to do with "the isles" than any other nation upon earth. Our geographical situation has given us this influence; and I think it may reasonably be inferred, without any imputation of cant or fanaticism, that our great political power and influence were not given us out of mere partiality and favouritism, but to make us instrumental to the accomplishment of God's purposes for the recovery of the ruined world. I think

that the moral, political, and religious aspect of this country may entitle us to consider it as the headquarters of Christendom. The eye of the world, and the eye of Providence, are both upon us: and they demand from us a return proportionate to the advantages we possess, and a performance of that duty of which the instruments are placed in our hands.

It is delightful to persons who contemplate with interest the moral improvement of mankind, the gradual expulsion of evil from human society, and the progressive advancement of that remedial scheme which is to accomplish the restoration of fallen man, to consider the great mass of moral machinery which is now in operation in this country for the accomplishment of these purposes. If you will have the goodness to cast your eye over the list of public meetings which generally take place in London alone, (independently of provincial and affiliated societies,) in the months of April and May, you will see how great an interest the people of this country take in promoting, in every possible manner, the moral, and spiritual, and temporal improvement of mankind. Believing as I do that the destinies of nations are in the hands of a never-sleeping Providence, when I consider not only the numbers of persons attending these meetings, but the thousand times greater numbers throughout the kingdom connected with them, and supporting them, by their talents, their industry, their fortunes, and (I hope I shall not be charged with hypocrisy when I say) their prayers, I cannot doubt that their united energies have contributed greatly to uphold the fortunes of this country; (Exodus xvii. 11; Gen. xviii. 28; James v. 16;) and that had it not been for them, and others of a kindred character, the mere political administration of its

resources could never have accomplished it. Such being the aspect of this country, with respect to the nations of the world, if the streams of Christianity which are to fertilize the moral wildernesses of the globe are to flow from hence, it is of the utmost importance that we should purify the source before we pour forth its issues on distant lands. If we neglect to do it, instead of advancing we shall absolutely retard the purposes of Divine Providence, and incur the guilt of neglected duties, violated trusts, and abortive enterprises.

When I consider the great practical difficulties which stand in the way of the numerous improvements, which both the government and the country are desirous of seeing accomplished, I cannot help observing how greatly they surpass the practical difficulties attending this subject. The latter appear almost as nothing. And the arguments adduced by those who oppose this measure, at the same time that they approve of the principle and are favourable to the object of it, appear to be founded on an incorrect view both of the province of a government, the rights of a people, and the nature of that authority which God has delegated. I think it cannot be denied that the ultimate and legitimate object of all human government is to further the designs of Providence in reclaiming the fallen world to a state of moral and religious obedience; and to advance the scheme which the Divine counsels have long since contrived, and already in a great degree accomplished, for its final restoration to a state of moral innocence, and renewed intercourse with the Divine Essence. For this purpose mere political administration is wholly insufficient. If human governments do not harmonize with the authority from which they emanate, they are like a pro-

vince at variance with the parent state, and tend only to disorder, anarchy, and dissolution. We have the highest authority for saying that a kingdom so divided against itself cannot stand. And as it is the undoubted duty of the governor of a province to exercise his government in harmony with the views and directions of the parent state, it is no less the duty of the governor of a kingdom to enforce the Divine commands, and to execute, as far as he is able, the purposes of the Divine counsels. It is impossible that the subjects of any kingdom can have any rights at variance with these; and any liberties they may claim, which are contrary to an express command of God, are as clearly inadmissible as any privilege they might demand of acting in defiance of the laws of their country.

But as questions of this sort are frequently questions of construction and degree, and are often resolved into considerations of expediency, I will take the liberty of prosecuting the inquiry a little further, in order to show, not only that the people have no right to such an indulgence, but also that they are not in an attitude to demand it.

The principal argument by which the desecration of the Sabbath in large towns is usually defended is, that it is necessary to the health and amusement of the inhabitants; or, in other words, to the renovation of their bodily and mental energies. That such modes of spending the Sabbath are by no means necessary to either of these is clearly evinced by the practice of many (I might say, most) large towns of a second or third-rate size, such as Northampton, Warwick, and many others, where no such things are usually done. Not only is no such dissipation in such towns either practised or de-

sired, but I have no doubt that if places of resort for such purposes were set up, the feelings of a very large majority of the inhabitants would be greatly shocked at it. They find more sober and rational recreations quite sufficient to repair their exhausted energies both of body and mind ; and I have no doubt that they enter upon the secular employments of the following day with better health, spirits, and tempers, than those who have indulged in the dissipations of larger towns. There are probably few of those who have wives and children, who do not spend part of the Sunday evening in religious reading, discourse, or contemplation ; thereby increasing their stock of religious knowledge, and, what I think of much more consequence, of religious sentiment and feeling ; and thereby becoming better men, better subjects, better Christians, and better members of society.

Although the greater extent and closer atmosphere of the larger towns, particularly of the metropolis, may make a larger range for healthful exercise more necessary, the spacious streets, squares, parks, or environs, are sufficiently within the compass of a moderate walk for the purposes of sober and rational recreation : and the number and variety of interesting objects that occur, exclusively of places of amusement, afford a sufficient relaxation to intensity of thought, or the monotony of fixed application. But instead of the quiet return to the modest fireside, and the peaceful and soothing exercises of religious contemplation, the humble family is drawn from its proprieties by the meretricious allurements of a vicious sensuality, and loses all the finer feelings of its nature in low debauch and criminal profanation. These are the tastes they carry home with them, and feed upon for the following week, till a repetition of the same de-

basing indulgences on each successive Sabbath hardens the heart, and brutalizes the character, and produces a fixed dislike to every thing that is modest, rational, or serious. It is to little purpose that we issue cheap publications, to enlighten the understanding, refine the taste, and enlarge the charities of social existence, if these haunts of dissipation and vice are to draw away from the perusal of them the very persons for whose use they were designed, and counteract all the benefit they are calculated to produce, by implanting principles, tastes, and feelings, of exactly an opposite tendency.

That the people, or any part of the people, are in no condition to demand these indulgences, is clear, not only from their being contrary to an express command of God, (which is quite sufficient to justify the prohibition of them,) but also against the sense and feeling of a very large majority of the nation ; so that if any attempt at riot or insurrection was to be made by the discontented party, all the respectable part of the community would rise up to assist the government in putting them down, and government would find itself strengthened by the very resistance. The disposition to crime is greatly increased by this sabbatical revelry ; and I have no doubt that if it were put an end to, the morals of the people would improve, and our judicial calendars would at length cease to be a disgrace to our laws and to our country.

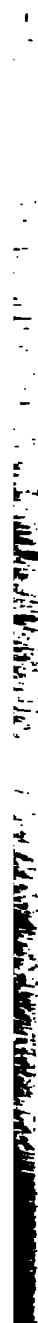
The affairs of the nation can never prosper till their administration is in all respects conformable to the principles of the Divine government. The most glaring instances of their opposition to it at present are, the habitual desecration of the Sabbath, the unrestrained and intemperate use of intoxicating spirits, and the moral

and political slavery of a large portion of our fellow-creatures. These are the moral ulcers that mar the beauty of England's countenance, and prevent the light of the Divine countenance from shining upon us with its full splendour. While we remain in a state of partial rebellion to the Divine government, though Providence may bear with us for a time, He will not favour us. Our affairs will go on in a sickly and feverish state, but they will never exhibit the complexion and vigour of a healthy temperament. We may shift our resources, do and undo, make and unmake, but we shall be like a man swimming against the stream, who can just keep his head above water, but make no progress. Nevertheless, when I consider the feelings of the nation on these topics, and the unquestionable desire of the ministry to remove every impediment to the national prosperity, to the utmost of their power, I do not despair of seeing these great moral ulcers ultimately cured, the eclipse of our political energies gradually removed, and the beams of the Divine favour shining upon us with increased splendour, and placing us in reality, as well as in appearance, on the footing of the most favoured nations.

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